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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000704

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SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER ADMIRAL FARGO MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN, JANUARY 19, 2005

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason: 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told PACOM Commander Admiral Thomas Fargo that last month's tsunami demonstrated the need for increased emphasis on

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disaster response in future Thai/US military exercises. During the January 19 meeting, Thaksin told Fargo that if the US needs to maintain its deployment of relief-related forces at Utapao a short while past its anticipated end-of-February/early March redeployment from Indonesia it would be "no problem." Fargo told the Prime Minister that the U.S. is prepared to help Thailand in the establishment of a tsunami early warning system. Turning to Thailand's south, Thaksin said that many of the instigators have now been identified and that there was no link to the JT or other international terrorist organizations. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Pacific Command Commander Admiral Thomas Fargo visited Thailand on January 17-19. On January 19, Admiral Fargo called on Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Participants:

U.S.

Admiral Fargo
Ambassador Boyce
PACOM Foreign Policy Advisor Huso
Chief JUSMAG CO. Dibrell
US Defense Attache Col. Page
Executive Assistant Col. Twomey
Public Affairs Officer Capt. Singley
Aide-de-Camp LTC Madkins
PACOM Country Desk Officer Maj. Ton
Embassy notetaker

Thailand

Prime Minister Thaksin
Foreign Minister Surikiart
NSC General Secretary General Winai
MFA America Director General Nongnuth
Notetakers

¶3. (U) Prime Minister Thaksin expressed appreciation for the assistance the US has provided Thailand following the tsunami. He thanked President Bush for calling him in the

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aftermath and stated that the U.S. played an especially important role in helping Thailand to cope with the disaster. Admiral Fargo thanked Thaksin for his sympathy for those Americans killed in the tsunami and offered condolences for the Thai victims. He added that Thailand's willingness and ability to participate the international relief effort has saved many lives.

NEED TO INCORPORATE DISASTER RELIEF IN EXERCISES

¶4. (SBU) Admiral Fargo attributed the effectiveness of Thai-U.S. relief cooperation on the long years of friendship and military cooperation, exemplified by the annual Cobra Gold exercises. Thaksin agreed and said that future joint exercises such as Cobra Gold should have an increased emphasis on disaster relief. He said that Thailand has had "too many incidents" that have highlighted the need for better civil-military coordination and disaster drills. Fargo said that civic action projects connected with this year's Cobra Gold exercise are being moved forward and directed towards the areas worst hit by the tsunami. He noted that the Combined Support Group (CSG) that coordinated the U.S. relief effort demonstrated that civil and military structures can operate in concert. Fargo added that a scenario including mass disaster humanitarian relief will be included in the Cobra Gold exercise.

THAKSIN SAYS THAILAND NEEDS CAPACITY BUILDING, NOT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

¶5. (SBU) Observing that Thailand was not as severely damaged as Indonesia and Sri Lanka, Thaksin said that direct financial assistance should go to those countries, not

Thailand. What Thailand needs is capacity building and expertise, especially in establishing a tsunami early warning system (EWS) and in rehabilitating damaged natural resources.

Thaksin added that other small projects, such as rebuilding destroyed village schools, would be welcome. Fargo told Thaksin that the United States can assist in setting up a tsunami EWS, having logged considerable experience in

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operating such a system in Hawaii. He added that Thailand's leadership in pushing for a regional EWS is very important.

DIRECT MILITARY ASSISTANCE WINDING DOWN OVER COMING WEEKS

16. (SBU) Fargo told the Prime Minister that direct military assistance in Thailand and Sri Lanka should wind up by month's end. He added that a military forensics team can remain in country as long as Thailand needs it. Operations in Indonesia, including much-needed helicopter support, should end by mid-to-late February. The relief units should all be redeployed from Utapao by the end of February or early March. In response, Thaksin said that if the US needs to maintain its deployment of relief-related forces at Utapao a short while past its anticipated redeployment from Indonesia it would be "no problem."

17. (C) Thaksin said that his government is trying to expedite the process of identifying and repatriating the remains of foreign victims of the tsunami. He expressed concern that relatives of Burmese victims are not showing up to claim the remains. Thaksin commented that it is "a little bit more difficult" coordinating with Burmese authorities than it would have been if Khin Nyunt was still the PM. He added that he finds that Than Shwe is firmly in control.

GETTING A HANDLE ON VIOLENCE-WRACKED SOUTH

18. (C) In answer to Fargo's query on the southern situation, Thaksin stated that his administration will be able to control the violence in the near future. He said that his security agencies have identified a number of the instigators of the violence. Thaksin said that these individuals are all Thais and that there are no direct links between the separatists and international terrorist groups such as the JI. He added that some of those suspected of inciting Thai Muslim youths to violence may have been in contact with terrorists while at school abroad, but Thaksin emphasized that there were no JI or other international terrorists in Thailand. He added that money donated by Muslims from abroad for mosques or schools in Thailand may also have been misappropriated by Thai separatists. Admiral Fargo told Thaksin that the U.S. assessment was the same as the Prime Minister's - there are no signs of a JI presence in Thailand.

19. (C) Thaksin said that his government will beef up the security forces presence in the deep southern provinces by basing a new division there. Thaksin said that this large permanent security force presence will demonstrate that the government will be able to protect the general population.

BOYCE